

The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Herbert E. Meyer, Vice Chairman
National Intelligence Council

SUBJECT: Evening Up the Odds with Moscow

1. Western leaders have always recognized--and resented--their built-in disadvantage when negotiating with the Russians. As a nineteenth century French nobleman named the Marquis de Custine shrewdly observed in his long-forgotten but once famous travel memoir, La Russie en 1839:

"If it is true that better diplomats are to be found among the Russians than among the most advanced peoples, the reason is that our press informs the Russians about every plan that is proposed and every event that occurs among us. Instead of prudently concealing our weaknesses we reveal them every morning with passion, while the Byzantine policy of the Russians, at work in the shadows, is careful to hide what they are thinking and doing and fearing. We go forward in the light of day; they advance under cover. We are blinded by the ignorance in which they leave us; they are enlightened by our candor. We are weakened by rumor; they are strengthened by secrecy. And there you have the secret of their cleverness."

2. Now, as the US and the Soviet Union move toward a new and perhaps comprehensive set of arms reduction talks, nothing will do more to assure a successful outcome than an effort on our part to limit the Soviets' built-in advantage. There are two ways to do this, and we are forging ahead on both.

3. The first, of course, is to restrict the Soviets' knowledge of our own internal deliberations. By throwing a thick and unprecedented cloak of secrecy around those key US officials directly involved in setting the US negotiating position, President Reagan has taken a vital step toward providing our side with a bit of the advantage the Soviets

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had to themselves during earlier sets of arms negotiations. Alas, members of the Washington press corps now are using every trick in the book to peek under this cloak, as usual holding aloft the somewhat frayed banner of the public's right to know. In fact, what the public has a right to know--and which as yet no journalist has shown the courage or decency to say--is that the Administration's effort to deliberate in secrecy, supported by a willingness to throw the book at officials who may be responsible for any leaks, will go a long way toward assuring our country's success at the negotiating table. It is if and when a draft treaty emerges that the public's right to know comes into play, with full disclosure of the treaty's terms and robust national debate on their merits or lack of merit.

4. The second way to diminish the Soviets' built-in advantage is for us to peek under the cloak of secrecy that Soviet society by its very nature creates for its leaders. There is much more to this than merely stealing secrets--although if some disgruntled Moscow bureaucrat with access to the Kremlin's bottom-line arms pact position cares to defect, the welcome he'll receive in Washington would make the welcome Paris gave Charles Lindbergh look like tea with the Archbishop. Far more important than secrets, as such, is analysis. More precisely, we need to understand the political, military, economic, technological, and social forces that are now driving Soviet leaders toward the negotiating table they stormed away from just last year.

5. Obviously the US intelligence community provides policymakers with its views of the forces at work on Soviet leaders and of these leaders' likely responses. But analysis of this sort need not--indeed, should not--come only from those with access to restricted data and unique sources. This country's corps of Soviet scholars and observers--academics, journalists, ex-officials, and so forth--has always provided a stream of reports and judgments about the Soviet Union. Now more than ever we need these contributions. For the more thorough and accurate is our grasp of forces that drive the Kremlin's view of arms negotiations, the better able will be US policymakers to establish and sustain prudent, workable bargaining positions.

6. Indeed it is precisely the contribution of this corps of specialists that provides some basis for hope that the forthcoming round of arms talks will bear sweet fruit. During the last year, a new consensus has begun to emerge. Namely, that the so-called "correlation of forces" now is turning against the Soviets, and that internal economic and social trends are worsening. While judgments on the extent and likely results of these trends vary widely, Western scholars and specialists generally agree that Soviet leaders perceive themselves and their regime to be under mounting external and internal pressure.

7. If this emerging consensus is valid, a fundamental change is taking place that we have not yet fully recognized. For the first time, the Soviets are coming to the negotiating table not out of confidence but rather out of concern. They seek not merely advantage, but relief. While the extent and significance of this shift is the focus of

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hot debate, one point is widely accepted. The Soviet Union's growing pessimism about its own prospects is due in no small part to the success of the Reagan Administration's economic, defense, and foreign policies.

8. Having brought the Soviets back to the negotiating table, the question is whether we Americans will have the self-discipline to sustain the momentum we have worked so hard, and paid so much, to develop. Turning our searchlights on ourselves rather than on the Soviets--and by doing so booting away the best chance we have ever had to even up the odds with Moscow and thus maybe, just maybe, secure an arms reduction deal that genuinely enhances our own national security--would be worse than a blunder. It would be a crime.

Herbert E. Meyer

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